

I developed tinnitus in my late forties. It started when I awoke one morning to a very annoying buzzing in my right ear that never subsided. Initially, it turned my life upside-down from a happy and usually positive personal to, on a couple of occasions contemplating suicide from the “hell” I was in.

It just so happened that my sudden onset of tinnitus coincided (or may have been triggered) with the very beginnings of menopause, known as perimenopause. At the time, although my symptoms of perimenopause were only mild, it was enough that it was influencing my adjustment and acceptance to tinnitus. I found that I had to isolate and treat my perimenopause symptoms first to support this combination. I hope that by describing what I found helped may be helpful to you but note you might find other things that assist you more, differently to what I did.

I wasn't aware that I was entering the perimenopausal state until a routine health check, requested by my GP, detected a decline in progesterone levels that placed me in this transition to menopause. I was surprised at the time because I didn't display any of the other typical symptoms like hot flushes or irregular periods and I remember thinking that this result might not be accurate and hence nothing for me to really worry about.

My tinnitus commenced just a few months after this health check and I guess looking back on it, I was more snappy, moody and my periods did start to become heavier and slightly more irregular. I went from usually suffering with mild PMT to, in combination with the tinnitus, getting majorly depressed. It was a vicious cycle of the combination of these two new body changes. I sought further medical advice. My gynaecologist of many years said I could trial some HRT or have an IUD inserted (to top up my declining progesterone levels) but I was reluctant to return to synthetic hormones (due to previous side effects), or try HRT this early, so I went looking for natural alternatives.

Whenever I was particularly hormonal my tinnitus would be more intrusive, and this would only make things worse. I remember thinking “if only my tinnitus wasn't so bad”, then I would feel better. I was blaming my tinnitus for the state I was in, which was extremely angry and frustrated.

In addition, I was aware of the mental health disorders that can impact women as they approach menopause, typically between 42 and 52 years of age. One study I read* states depression is 16 times more common in perimenopausal women than in any other group of Australians, and the greatest likelihood of committing suicide is between ages 50 and 54 among women. During this period, I felt anxious, scared, along with the most depressed I've ever felt as I didn't see a clear path out of this predicament.

Following a recommendation from a friend, I went to see a traditional Chinese acupuncturist, who in combination with Chinese medicine, specialised in treating menopause, depression and anxiety. He prescribed a mixture of herbs that are finely ground and drunk as a tea daily. Several of the herbs I searched online were mentioned in other products pertaining to provide a 'peaceful menopause'. I found the combination of acupuncture and Chinese medicine helped give me back my balance and vitality for life, which then allowed me to cope better to slowly accept my tinnitus as my new 'normal'. After a couple of days I really felt much more in control of my depression and anxiety.

Reflecting on it now, it could be that the tea and/or acupuncture had absolutely no benefit whatsoever, but it was just what I needed at the time to believe was helping me, providing the strength to slowly step out from the dark place I was in.

But to be honest, my tinnitus recovery didn't really start until I addressed my perimenopausal symptoms. It was a real learning curve and I wanted to share my experience with others.

In addition to Chinese medicine, I also learnt of other natural ways I could balance my hormones, such as:

1. Eating enough protein at every meal
2. Engaging in regular exercise
3. Avoiding sugar and refined carbs
4. Learning to better manage stress
5. Consuming healthy fats, including fish regularly
6. Getting where possible a consistent, high-quality sleep

While I haven't yet reached what I think is habituation 12 months into developing tinnitus, I have reached a current state where my tinnitus does not bother me nearly as much and I've learnt to accept its presence, particularly when it's most detectable (in the evenings and during quiet activities). I have learnt the hard way that there is no point focussing on it, or letting it ruin your day or your quality of life. Take control and be comforted that you are not alone in your journey through this mentally challenging period. Treat your perimenopause and you will find adjusting to your tinnitus is much easier to deal with in the first 6-12 months, as I found. It is a traumatic experience but slowly at first, you will recover and learn to put this behind you.

Research studies consistently state that tinnitus is most prevalent among the elderly and in women in their 40s, 50s and 60s. However, there appears to be mixed views as to whether tinnitus can be linked to perimenopause, menopause, or whether both conditions are purely age-related, so commonly can occur around the same time. There is some new evidence to suggest that a decrease in the female sex hormone estradiol, may contribute to the onset of tinnitus by somehow interfering with the sound signals from the ear to the brain. More research is needed to fully know for certain whether there is a link or not.

I hope you have found this article helpful.

*<http://medicalrepublic.com.au/beware-suicide-link-perimenopausal-depression/12752>